Scrutiny Committee

Date: **Thursday, 04 January 2024**
Time: **18:30**
Venue: **Council Chamber**
Address: Town Hall, Hall Plain, Great Yarmouth, NR30 2QF

AGENDA

Open to Public and Press

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

To receive any apologies for absence.

2 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

You have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in a matter to be discussed if it relates to something on your Register of Interests form. You must declare the interest and leave the room while the matter is dealt with.
You have a Personal Interest in a matter to be discussed if it affects
• your well being or financial position
• that of your family or close friends
• that of a club or society in which you have a management role
• that of another public body of which you are a member to a greater extent than others in your ward.
You must declare a personal interest but can speak and vote on the matter.

Whenever you declare an interest you must say why the interest arises, so that it can be included in the minutes.

3   MINUTES

To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on the 12 December 2023.

Minutes are to follow.

**4   22-161 - CONTROL CENTRE AND COMMUNITY ALARM   3 - 41
SERVICES EMERGENCY CONTRACT DECISION V3**

Report and confidential appendix attached.

** Please note to view the confidential appendix, Members will need to be logged in to view.**

5   EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC

In the event of the Committee wishing to exclude the public from the meeting, the following resolution will be moved:-

"That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 1 of Part I of Schedule 12(A) of the said Act."

EXEMPT INFORMATION - NOT FOR PUBLICATION

The content of APPENDIX 2 of this report qualifies as exempt information under section 100(A)(4) and paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as it is "information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)"

and

2) In relation to the "exempt" information, it has been determined that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information because disclosure would adversely affect the authority's ability to manage its commercial financial and business affairs.

Accordingly, it is proposed that **APPENDIX 2 of the report should remain exempt**.

SCRUTINY

URN:	**URN 22-161**
Report Title :	**Control Centre and Community Alarm Services Emergency Contract Decision**
Report to:	
Responsible Cabinet Member:	**Scrutiny Committee – 4 January 2024**
	Cllr Flaxman-Taylor, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Wellbeing
Responsible Director / Officer :	**Paula Boyce, Executive Director - People** **Kate Price, Head of Health Integration and Communities** **Nicola Turner, Head of Housing Assets**
Is this a Key decision ?	**No**

Date added to Forward Plan of Key Decisions if a Key Decision: N/a

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Scrutiny Committee invoked a Call-in (18 December 2023) in line with Article 18 of the Constitution, to consider the decision taken by Cabinet on 14 December 2023.

The decision relates to the direct award of the Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) and 24/7 Out of Hours Call Response Service due to a combination of significant elevated risks by way of operational emergency powers under the Constitution (Article 42.10.5).

This report sets out the process and procedure leading up to the Call-in.

The report provides members of the Committee with further information pertaining to the need for an urgent decision and use of Article 42.10.5.

The report also provides additional information, as recommended by Scrutiny, to retain a fully complaint service in-house and a full business case to facilitate a direct award should the decision to outsource stand.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Scrutiny:

    a) **Notes the contents of this report which sets out the rationale for use of emergency powers.**

    b) **Reviews the Full Business Case to retain the service in-house and investment to ensure full compliance as an ARC service.**

    b) **Reviews the decision to invoke emergency powers in light of the further information contained in this report.**

1. BACKGROUND

1.1   Cabinet (4 December 2023) received an officer report proposing the outsourcing of the Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) and 24/7 Out of Hours Call Response Service. Due to a combination of significant elevated risks, the Monitoring Officer supported the Executive's use of Emergency Powers as set out in the Council's Constitution (Article 42.10.5).

1.2   Ahead of making that decision, Cabinet requested the Scrutiny Committee (12 December 2023) pre-scrutinise the proposal. In doing so, Scrutiny Committee recommended that Cabinet consider:

    a.   Taking time to develop a full Business Case, undertaking a procurement process and any relevant consultations during the proposed 14-month consultation period.

    b.   Addressing any immediate risk by undertaking a recruitment campaign and increasing the number of shifts given to relief staff.

1.3 Cabinet (14 December 2023) further considered the proposal taking into account Scrutiny's recommendations and resolved to:

1. Support the direct award of a contract to the current standby service provider, CareLine365, provides current shift cover in order to minimise risk to residents under existing officer delegations to the Executive Director – People and Section 151 Officer in association with the Monitoring Officer as an Operational Emergency under article (42.10.5) given the possible risk to life.

2. Noted the procurement of a 24/7 out of hours telephone call answering service needed to deliver the emergency out of hours call handling (currently provided by the alarm monitoring service as an additional service) will need to be expedited as a result of the above.

3. Agree to Officers developing a Business Case working with TSA on a robust service standard i.e. what would it cost to retain the services in-house versus externalising.

4. Agree to Officers Exploring with remaining staff their willingness to cover additional shifts.

5. Agree that Officers fully consult and engage with staff and service users in relation to the future service provision.

6. Agree that Officer consider options of existing frameworks for sheltered housing alarm monitoring provision and continuity for dispersed community alarms.

7. Agree that Officers prepare robust communications plan which describes the new, improved service and market the opportunity to new customers.

8. Agree to Officers mobilise towards a new service once all due diligence, financial, procurement and legal checks have been undertaken.

1.4 A Scrutiny Call-in was invoked (18 December 2023) owing to:

The presentation wasn't shown to the [Scrutiny] Committee due to how late it was given to the Committee, some slides including the last one below are key:

Next Steps if approved

- Develop a Business Case working with TSA on a robust service standard i.e. what would it cost to retain the services in-house versus externalising.
- Explore with remaining staff their willingness to cover additional shifts.
- Fully consult and engage with staff and service users in relation to the future service provision
- Consider options of existing frameworks for sheltered housing alarm monitoring provision and continuity for dispersed community alarms
- Prepare robust communications plan which describes the new, improved service and market the opportunity to new customers
- Mobilise towards a new service once all due diligence, financial, procurement and legal checks have been undertaken

GREAT YARMOUTH BOROUGH COUNCIL

The Committee should be allowed to ask more questions to responsible officers. Some key questions were not answered including the lack of accountability for council actions in both hiring staff and conducting the digital switchover. We believe there are pivotal to be answered to confirm if they can actually use [the] operational emergency clause.

2. FURTHER INFORMATION SUPPLIED

2.1   Members are asked to review the content of the following documentation supplied as part of this Scrutiny Report:

- Full Business Case – Appendix 1.

- Rationale for the use of emergency powers – Appendix A.

- Draft specification for an outsourced monitoring service - Appendix B.

- Confidential Annex – Due diligence and CareLine365 financials.

3. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1   The Council's Constitution provides for a direct award in certain conditions under Article 42.10.5 Operational Emergency:

(a) Subject to any legal limitations, the Head of Paid Service, the s151 Officer or an Executive Director, having consulted the Monitoring Officer (or their nominated deputy), may approve an exemption to any part of these Contract Standing Orders that is necessary because of an Operational Emergency creating immediate risk to life, persons or property within the Borough or causing serious disruption to Council services (including any emergency or disruption under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004). An Operational Emergency is a situation that is the result of an unforeseen event over which the Council has no control. This procedure must not be used when a requirement has become late due to lack of planning on the part of the Council.

(b) Full documentation must be completed regardless of the urgency of the requirement and a full and transparent audit trail must be made throughout the procurement process. Where the value of the Contract is over £250,000 a report supporting the use of this power must be taken to Cabinet at the first available opportunity.

4. RISK IMPLICATIONS

4.1   The risk of allowing the service to continue as it stands for a longer period of time is potentially risking the lives of residents should the service fail for lack of staff to answer calls or ensure the operation running of the service at short notice.

4.2   Missing alarm calls could lead to the council being held responsible for negligence in the case of a tenant or resident's death should the alarm not connect.

4.3   Delaying decisions in this report longer term, outside the immediate risk, will mean the council still has to upgrade the sheltered housing alarm equipment in the interim to adapt the system

to full digital functionality (circa £112,000). This may or may not be compatible with the successful contractor and therefore presents a financial waste.

4.4   As this digital switch-over is happening UK-wide, there is a risk that the limited market of quality providers may be engaged with bidding for other contracts and may not be as receptive to a smaller quantity of connections when there are more lucrative contracts on offer.

4.5   Ongoing issues with our own IT services are already posing issues with our VPN regularly causing periods of non-coverage when external call monitoring is used which would not be required with a direct service, reducing risk significantly.

5.   CONCLUSION

5.1   It is remains urgent that the Council takes these decisions based on the risk to alarm service users, the potential financial impact and associated legal risks. With these risks in place it is our obligation to ensure we do all we can to mitigate these to avoid risking lives.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Previous ELT Reports March 2023 and November 2023 and updated appraisal of market options for services in-scope.

- Cabinet Report (4 and 14 December 2023)

- Full Business Case - See Appendices attached to this report.

Consultations	Comment
Monitoring Officer Consultation:	As part of ELT
Section 151 Officer Consultation:	As part of ELT
Existing Council Policies:	As set-out in Council Constitution
Equality Issues/EQIA assessment:	Yes – made available to Committee

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BOROUGH COUNCIL

Business Case

Project Name	Control Centre – Community & Sheltered Alarms Service
Document Authors	Kate Price, Head of Health Integration and Communities Nicola Turner, Head of Housing Assets
Project Manager	As above
ELT Lead	Paula Boyce, Executive Director - People Chris Furlong, Executive Director - Property & Housing Assets

Revision History

Version	Author	Date	Changes/Comments
0.1	Nicola Turner and Kate Price	18 December 2023	Initial draft produced
0.2	Kate Price, Nicola Turner, Paula Boyce	19 December 2023	Update of risk table to show risk scores, Cabinet decision details added. Wording clarifications.
0.3	Kate Price	20 December 2023	Addition of Comparison of Specification section, further wording clarifications. Refinement of 2024/5 Budget. Appendices added.
0.4	Nicola Turner, Kate Price,	21 December 2023	Confidential Appendix created, references to appendices added, 2024/5 budget completed. Minor wording amendments to reflect appendices. Clarification of Option 1 added.
0.5	Paula Boyce	22 December 2023	Reviewed as SRO.

Background

The Council's Control Centre provides a 24/7 monitoring service for the following functions:

- Sheltered housing alarms (including fire/smoke alarms in communal areas and lift alarms).
- Community dispersed alarms.
- Be at Home service users.
- Out of Hours telephone answering service.

The Control Centre is a single operator service with three shifts a day. Staff resilience and recruitment issues have meant that since July 2022, Careline365 have provided ad hoc shift cover and cover for the night shift operator break.

NOTE: The Out of Hours telephone service is out of scope for this Business Case.

Rationale for Change

The Control Centre is facing a number of challenges and heightened risks which resulted in a report to Cabinet (4 and 14 December 2023) proposing the use of emergency powers to outsource the monitoring service. The elevated risks relate to both staffing and technology failure. As such the proposal is to undertake a direct award to an external provider, Careline 365, for the monitoring contract pertaining to the sheltered alarms, dispersed community alarms and Be at Homes alarms. A new Out of Hours telephone service will also be separately procured.

The rationale of the officers' report is:

- Increased and unsustainable risk to the ability to staff the Control Centre, following notification to staff of potential to outsource monitoring service.
- Careline365 has a contract to provide ad hoc shift cover and is covering 18% of shifts with extremely limited ability to cover addition shifts at short/no notice.
- Issues with Control Centre IT – risk of failure in call handling due to VPN/internet connections which prevent connections or prevent home working/remote cover by Careline365.
- Increase in call drop-outs due to change to digital phonelines and telephone exchanges.
- An ageing analogue system not compatible with the national digital switch-over and out of support as a business IT system making it more prone to IT-related failures.

The service risks have been recorded within the Corporate Risk Register (Risks 12b & 17) since July 2022, with officers managing those risks by putting in place mitigations thus far. The current risk score is 'Very High'.

Following Pre-Scrutiny of the Cabinet Report (12 December 2023), on 14 December 2023, Cabinet approved the recommendations in the report set out below:

1. Supports the direct award of a contract to the current standby service provider, CareLine365, which provides current shift cover in order to minimise risk to residents under existing Officer delegations to the Executive Director – People and Section 151 Officer in association with the Monitoring Officer as an Operational Emergency under article (42.10.5) given the possible risk to life.
2. Notes the procurement of a 24/7 out of hours telephone call answering service needed to deliver the emergency out of hours call handling (currently provided by the alarm monitoring service as an additional service) will need to be expedited as a result of the above.
3. Agree to Officers developing a Business Case working with TSA on a robust service standard i.e., what would it cost to retain the services in-house versus externalising.
4. Agree to Officers exploring with remaining staff their willingness to cover additional shifts.
5. Agree that Officers fully consult and engage with staff and service users in relation to the future service provision.
6. Agree that Officer consider options of existing frameworks for sheltered housing alarm monitoring provision and continuity for dispersed community alarms.
7. Agree that Officers prepare robust communications plan which describes the new, improved service and market the opportunity to new customers.

8. Agree to Officers mobilise towards a new service once all due diligence, financial, procurement and legal checks have been undertaken.

Appendix A provides the rationale for the urgency of the decision requested.

Basis of Business Case

This Business Case identifies the cost of staffing and additional requirements to retain an in-house Control Centre and resolve the issues which are currently putting service delivery at risk, showing the full financial costs of retaining an in-house Control Centre in 2024/5.

To retain the service in-house the following requirements apply:

- Increase staffing to provide for TSA compliant service (2 operators per shift) with increased management presence for escalation purposes.
- Replace remaining analogue dispersed community alarms with digital dispersed alarms and provide for a rolling upgrade programme over a five-year life cycle after this.
- Upgrade existing sheltered housing alarm analogue hardware (racks) to enable them to have digital functionality pending future full replacement to ensure connectivity during transition to digital phonelines and exchanges and post transition.
- Upgrade current analogue monitoring IT system (Jontek) to a digital enabled monitoring system including full system switch of existing data.

Option Appraisal

The following options apply:

Option 1: Upgrade the Control Centre to address digital and staffing risks *[Column a]*

This is the option explored in this Business Case. This option has been modelled based on a service structure which allows for two-operator staffing capacity over the 24/7 service with increased management for escalation and line management to allow for TSA compliance. This is based on approx. 16 FTE equivalents over various roles and four Relief Operator posts. The model and costings reflect upgrading all alarms to digital, using a MPR approach to smooth the capital cost of the borrowing required to purchase equipment over the five-year lifespan on an alarm and repairs costs for digital equipment plus the increased costs for a digital platform to replace the current Jontek platform. In addition, the cost of upgrading the sheltered housing racks to support digital functionality is included. All additional service costings are adapted and updated from the current costs, increased proportionate to the FTE increase where required. The costs of this option are shown in the table below reflecting the full year 2024/5 budget.

Option 2: Outsource the Control Centre *[Column b]*

This option would outsource the monitoring service provided by the Control Centre, with TUPE arrangements in place for staff. As part of the outsourcing via a direct award, Careline365 would provide a "Digital Bridge" functionality which will provide on an interim basis assurance of digital connection to the sheltered housing racks, pending a future full replacement.

A Careline365 contract would be put in place for monitoring of sheltered housing and the Be at Home alarms only. Careline365 would take-on the dispersed community alarms (opt-in arrangements to be in place for existing users).

The costs of this option and comparison against Option 1 are shown in the Confidential Annex. The Confidential Annex also includes a summary of the financial due diligence undertaken on Careline365.

A copy of the draft specification for an outsourced monitoring service is attached at Appendix B.

Option 3: Do Nothing *[Column c]*

This option would see the existing service continue as is with no upgrades to address the transition to digital phone lines and exchanges. Staff vacancies would be readvertised seeking to fill vacant posts through normal recruitment channels. This option is not tenable due to the current risks associated with the current (prone to failure) analogue IT system and its need to be compatible with the digital upgrade. This Business Case discounts this option. The costs of maintaining the Control Centre "as is" for 2024/5 are shown in the table below for comparison purposes.

2024/25 Budget

For the basis of the costs shown in this table, see the Confidential Annex. The Confidential Annex provides details of the costs for Option 2.

Revenue Costs	[a] Upgrade in-house	[c] current service	Difference (a-c)
	Option 1	Option 3	
Staffing costs	£868,777	£366,431	£502,346
Associated staffing costs (training, recruitment, insurance, mileage)	£47,678	£43,525	£4,153
Additional premises costs (generator, confidential waste, phonelines etc)	£32,655	£29,522	£3,133
Alarm costs (repairs, cleaning, replacements, SIMs, inc. capital MPR costs as noted below)	£140,299	£57,859	£82,440
Software for call management	£49,380	£37,031	£12,349
Depreciation	£11,378	£10,344	£1,034
Bad debt and insurance provision	£7,712	£7,011	£701
Internal recharges (HR, Finance, IT etc)	£165,473	£150,430	£15,043

Contract costs	£0	£0	£0
Total cost in year	**£1,323,354**	**£702,153**	**£621,201**
Income in year	-£335,834	-£335,834	£0
Deficit / Cost to the Council	£987,519	£366,319	£621,201
Capital Costs	**Option 1**	**Option 3**	**Difference**
HRA cost for interim digital upgrade	£112,000	£0	£112,000
GF Dispersed alarm upgrade[1]	£336,999	£0	£336,999
Total capital expenditure	£448,999	£0	£448,999

Comparison of Service Specification

The tables below show the differences between the services for a retained and upgraded in-house provision [Option 1] and a managed contract with an external provider [Option 2]. For Option 2, both technical and qualitative areas of the contract would be managed via a clear service agreement and KPIs.

A draft of these contract expectations, produced with support from the TSA as the industry experts, is included as Appendix B as above.

	In-house Service Provision (Option 1)	**CareLine365 Contract (Option 2)**
Technical Differences	Service would continue to run on Council provided IT which is not bespoke for an ARC (Alarm Response Centre) and is an area of risk that will not reduce based on the increased resourcing. Council would change alarm receiving software to be fully digital which is an off-the-shelf purchased product. All hardware is purchased at wholesale point. External company for hardware installation and servicing. Interim upgrade of sheltered housing racks required to ensure digital functionality.	IT is designed for an ARC (Alarm Response Centre) set up as the main service provision of the company. Already use digital software product EVO which is developed in-house for regular improvements. Vertical integration of hardware provision and development of new products, as well as options to purchase wholesale. External company for hardware installation and servicing. "Digital Bridge" functionality provides for digital connectivity of sheltered housing racks.
Qualitative Differences	Local call handers have good local knowledge being based in Great Yarmouth which aid in rapport building with customers.	Call handlers will be based in Norwich and therefore may have Norfolk knowledge, but not expected to be as localised as Great Yarmouth unless they

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[1] Please note this cost, which covers £50,000 software upgrade costs, £219,600 for alarm purchases and the associated costs of borrowing at 5% interest, is also accounted for in the alarm costs element of the budget as this initial capital expenditure would be accounted as MPR over the five-year life span of the equipment.

	Repairs logging over an alarm call for Sheltered Housing tenants is being done but is not part of the core offer – this would be stopped if the service remained in-house as it poses a risk to calls coming through due to limited phone lines and operators.	are commuting/remote working from the borough.
		Will not take repair requests over the alarm call but can provide information on the correct route to take through agreed signposting protocols.
	Reassure vulnerable people when they are awaiting ambulances and raising safeguarding concerns for those with an unusual call pattern or who disclose relevant information.	Reassure vulnerable people when they are awaiting ambulances and raising safeguarding concerns for those with an unusual call pattern or who disclose relevant information. Where the safeguarding is connected to a GYBC tenants, this information will be shared. Advice those using the alarm for other council services of the correct routes for their queries.
	Accepting responsibility for council services which should not be reported on the alarm (such as lost keys or questions about services). This is current practice but would be reviewed based on the increased risk due to limited incoming phonelines and operators.	

Cost Implications – Service Users

The tables below show the cost to service users on a full cost recovery basis in 2024/5 for a retained and upgraded in-house service [Option 1]. This reflects covering the costs of providing the service, not seeking to make any additional profit from the service delivery.

At the current rate of connections, cost per user to breakeven on Option 1 Model =

Total cost of service (exc. current income)	£1,323,354
Static cost to HRA for Sheltered	-£93,000[2]
Remaining cost to be met by Community Alarm commercial users	£1,230,354
Total users	915 households
Annual monitoring and rental cost per user	£1,344.65
Monthly monitoring and rental costs user	£112.05
Weekly monitoring and rental costs user	£25.86
Weekly increase on monitoring	£21.80

At current rate of connections, users required to breakeven on Option 1 Model =

Cost to be recovered	£1,230,354
Cost per year per connection (no fee increase)	£211.12
Connections needed	5,828 people
Increase in customers needed	4,913 people

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[2] charge for monitoring to sheltered tenants

The table below compares current costs for the community alarms against those of competing services operating in the borough.

Operator	Set Up Cost	Monthly Cost for Basic Alarm and Monitoring
GYBC current cost	£54 - £65	£17.58
GYBC model costs (if increased to cover costs)	£54 - £65	£112.05
n-able (Norse)	£0	£15.99
CareLine365	£0	£11.99 - £15.99 (free £15 voucher)
Telecare24	£45	£9.00 - 13.99 (free key safe)

Risk Appraisal

The risks and mitigation reflect the current known risk status and mitigations. Risks and required mitigations are being regularly monitored to reflect current risk profile.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	RAG	Mitigation
Staffing – unable to cover all shifts.	4	5		Relief Staff asked if can increase number of staffs whilst still maintain their ability to cover shifts at short notice (reflecting the relief operator role), identification of wider pool of staff to cover shifts. Careline365 aware may need more shifts covering (subject to their capacity). Closely monitoring rota. Business case proposes recruitment to increase staffing.
Vulnerability of IT for Control Centre – loss of remote working/VPN connections.	4	5		Change freeze in place – so no changes can be made to Control Centre infrastructure including broadband connections. However, under option 1, this risk can never be fully removed.
Analogue to digital upgrade - impacting call fall out rates. (currently increasing)	4	5		Costs to replace remaining analogue dispersed alarms in budget along with cost of interim digital upgrade for sheltered alarm racks.
Ability to maintain reliability of the Jontek analogue call answering system.	4	5		Replacement system for digital compatibility to be sourced.

Equality Impact Assessment summary

No EQIA has been done on the revised model as it would be assumed to represent no material change in the service other than significantly reducing operational risk based on staffing.

A full EQIA has been undertaken and reviewed by Norfolk County Council under the existing support arrangements for the alternative to outsource the service to an external specialist provider.

The assessment of the NCC team is that the proposed move to outsource the service can be seen as *a broadly positive step with the outcome being a service* which is a benefit to those with protected characteristics. This EQIA is available for review.

Urgent Decision Rationale Paper

Project Name	Control Centre – Urgent Decision Request
Document Author	Kate Price, Head of Health Integration and Communities Nicola Turner, Head of Housing Assets
Project Manager	As above
ELT Lead	Paula Boyce, Executive Director - People Chris Furlong, Executive Director - Property & Housing Assets

Revision History

Version	Author	Date	Changes/Comments
0.1	Kate Price	20 December 2023	Initial Draft
0.2	Review by Paula Boyce and Chris Furlong	21 December 2023	Identified areas for inclusion
0.3	Nicola Turner and Kate Price	22 December 2023	Finalised detail and updated paper

Background

The Council's Control Centre resilience has been the subject of review for some time and ongoing risks have been monitored. The risk has been reported to Audit & Risk Committee as part of the Corporate Risk Register (Risk 12b) and tracking back Risk 12b was a 'medium', was raised to 'high' and in July 2022 it was rated as a 'very high' risk. There is also a separate risk (Risk 17) which covers the national digital infrastructure rollout specifically.

This risk assessment (12b) was then lowered subsequently to medium based on one element of the risk area which was staff lone working when we contracted with an external provider to assist us to cover lunch breaks and evening shifts in July 2022 and they were also able to provide some shift cover where there were high levels of leave or staff absence.

During this time, risk has been monitored and mitigated with officers working towards a longer-term plan based on the digital rollout which required significant levels of research and options appraisals to ensure a robust decision-making process.

On 4th October 2023 officers presented an options appraisal to Executive Leadership Team (ELT) with recommendations to outsource the alarm receiving centre (ARC) based on a full procurement process with TSA consultancy support on technical details and market value appraisals. At this point risks were noted as high with an explanation of these known risks.

The result of this meeting was agreement to begin work on a more detailed plan for the proposed outsourcing, including understanding the legal implications on staff and abiding by our requirement to engage with them around the proposed changes. Once there was further detail to be able to present the option with more accurate costs and times, this would have been taken to Cabinet at the right point in the process for an informed paper with Scrutiny able to review when there were further details to be assessed.

Identification of increased risks around staffing

On 9th November 2023, a meeting was held with staff to discuss the forthcoming plans and the reason for the recommended outsourced contract and building of the tender scope. Staff linked 50% or more to the service would be in scope for TUPE to any newly appointed company as per guidance from HR and NP Law.

It had been anticipated in the initial risks for the options paper that the staff had been aware of this review for some time under previous management and therefore the decision would have been expected which meant there was a lower risk to staffing levels changing. At this meeting, and in a subsequent meeting with another staff member one to one, one staff member noted their intention to retire in March 2024 so felt they would not be in the process, and three further staff indicated that they would be likely to look for other roles before the completion of the process. There was also some clear upset and unrest where staff members indicated that they felt that they may not wish to cover some of the more unsociable shifts when they felt this outcome was a result of the Council not caring about their welfare.

It is also noted that there are two posts (Independent Living Team Manager and Community Alarms Officer) which are single points of failure having only one post holder in each role, therefore any risk to those post holders leaving or being absent is heightened.

To better understand this potential risk, officers reviewed absence records for the team to identify the likelihood of shift cover required based on previous trends and found this to be significantly high with 43 days absence logged in December the previous year. It was noted from a risk perspective, it should be assumed that this would be similar or increased based on the reaction of the staff.

The staff reaction highlighted that this area of risk – staff leaving the service at a swift rate or being absent from work – had risen higher than anticipated based on the engagement around the decision and required further investigation to ensure mitigations could be made.

Staff are required to give 4 weeks' notice for their roles, and it takes 2-3 months to train a new member of staff to be able to work alone depending on experience and ability. Given the structure of the team having lone call handlers staff must be considered competent to work alone before they can be a full member on the rota. If recruitment began instantly, on a short, fixed term contract

basis given the forthcoming likelihood of the contract being outsourced, it would have been around April - May before there was a newly trained cohort of call handlers. This would be predicated on people applying for the roles and while these roles had not been put to recruitment since March (when it was last unsuccessful) recent recruitment into other roles at higher grades in the Council had been routinely failed to recruit.

Staff recruitment to vacant posts cannot be relied on to minimise the risks for a 14-month period which is the approximate time period which is the time frame expected to need to complete a full tender process.

Officers contacted CareLine365 to identify whether there would be scope for the duration of a 14-month procurement process to significantly increase cover and, due to the complexity of them covering a software platform (Jontek) they do not routinely use and only having limited operators able to do this rather than their full workforce, they were not able to give any guarantees that while the Council was on Jontek this would be possible.

Identifying increased risk of failed receipts

As part of the process of updating all the monitoring information to inform a tender process, it was noted that the level of call failure rates had reached over 2% (2.16%) of the total volume of calls for the first time and was showing a general increase. This was despite the risk mitigation of upgrading all alarms within areas of digitally upgraded infrastructure and increasing the proportion of alarms upgraded to digital generally.

A failed receipt is a pressed alarm call which does not connect to an operator, therefore the outcome of such a call could be that an emergency call does not connect, the resident does not receive the support they have called to request and, as an ultimate outcome, a resident could die as a result of lack of attendance from medical services. In the event of deaths where there is an alarm present, the hearing into the death would look at whether the alarm was used, whether the call connected and whether the correct process was followed by the call handler to do all they could to minimise risk to life. Should the council be found negligent for not having addressed these risks, they could be considered liable for the death.

Since the request, there have been increased national media coverage highlighting of telecare failures and subsequent situations as above, prompting a position from the Government and a charter being introduced for additional risk mitigation steps to be taken as part of the digital roll out for more vulnerable users (one example of which is telecare alarm users). However, this only covers the localised switch for vulnerable individuals and not the risk of the wider digital change still impacting calls utilising non-local digitally upgraded pathways and would only add extra protection for those who meet the charter criteria.

Requesting an Urgent Decision

The issue re an increased risk of being unable to cover all Control Centre shifts and increases in failed receipts presented a significant risk to the service which officers could not mitigate as both are factors out of the control of officers – with the risk increasing further at any time should staff take a leave of absence or resign their posts. The proposed approach of a full procurement was requested for review by ELT to look at options which would alleviate this risk to the service not being able to operate at short notice and ensure this risk was carried for only as long as was necessary.

Officers presented this increased risk to ELT on Wednesday 22nd November 2023 where it was recommended that this level of risk presented an unacceptable risk of a service failure resulting in a risk to the lives and health of the service users. It was agreed by the Monitoring Officer that the situation could be deemed an Operational Emergency article (42.10.5) of the Councils' Constitution due to the possible risk to life from a service failure given the unforeseen higher risk in both staffing and external availability of cover.

As the need to take action to resolve the risk was urgent, it was requested to be included at the earliest point for Cabinet to consider a report identifying the need for urgent action using emergency powers to outsource the service through direct appointment to the company working in partnership with the Council currently. The next available Cabinet meeting was Monday 4th December 2023 and the corresponding paper, to comply with the requirement to publish decisions in public, needed to be submitted by Friday 24th November 2023. Provision was not made in this paper to exempt the decision from Scrutiny, as can be required of an urgent decision, in order to allow full transparency of the rationale of the decision requested of Cabinet.

Position since the request

It is noted that since these heightened risks were raised two staff members in the service area have secured alternative employment offers, around their current Council hours. While these is not resignations, this will, however reduced their availability to cover shifts at short notice, and we have had several absences by staff due to Covid including a relief operator who was offered additional hours and acted as our standby for short notice absence from other staff members.

As it stands in December 2023, within the service area three staff members have met Sickness Absence Report triggers due to high absence levels. There is currently one staff member signed off until January, three members of staff have had absences due to illness including an increased prevalence of Covid and shifts have needed to be covered at short notice by both internal staff changing their shifts and requesting additional cover than planned from CareLine365.

Risk Assessment for an Urgent Decision

The table below identifies the risk score to the known risks impacting the service at October 2023 when a formal procurement process (which could take 14 months to complete) was agreed as the way forward and when the need for an urgent decision became clear in November 2023. The change in the scores was mainly driven by the increase to staff cover and potential retirement/resignations.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	RAG	Mitigation
Staffing – unable to cover all shifts.	2	5	October	Relief Staff maintained as on standby to cover short notice based on vacancies. CareLine365 contracted in advance to cover night shifts and leave.
	4	5	November	Steps to mitigate are not guaranteed. The requested use of

				the Relief Operators to be offered more shifts has increased the risk of providing short notice cover as has a resurgence in Covid cases.
Vulnerability of IT for Control Centre – loss of remote working/VPN connections.	4	5	October	Change freeze in place – so no changes can be made to Control Centre infrastructure including broadband connections.
	4	5	November	
Analogue to digital upgrade - impacting call fall out rates.	3	5	October	Costs to replace remaining analogue dispersed alarms in budget along with cost of interim digital upgrade for sheltered alarm racks.
	4	5	November	Updated review of failed receipts (calls which don't connect to a call handler) showed this was higher than the previous review and had been increasing.
Ability to maintain reliability of the Jontek analogue call answering system.	4	5	October	Replacement system for digital compatibility to be sourced.
	4	5	November	

Provision of an Alarm Receiving Centre for Telecare Alarm Call Monitoring

Tender Requirements and Specification

DRAFT

Table of Contents

1   Overview

1.1   Procurement Objectives

The main objectives of this contract are to:

1)   achieve an overall satisfaction in line with GYBC's key performance indicators;

2)   provide high quality services with which customers are satisfied;

3)   demonstrate value for money in a proactive and consistent manner;

4)   allow for transparency of costs in order to allow for recharges to be made;

5)   build strong on-going relationship with customer focused service providers;

6)   ensure compliance with Public Contracts Regulations 2015; and

7)   deliver social value outcomes.

2   Telecare and Telehealth

Telecare and Telehealth products support individuals or groups of individuals with living independently.

2.1   Telecare

Telecare services are aimed at people, social care and/or health services, to keep living independently e.g. those with:

–   physical or learning disabilities;

–   mental health problems;

–   people living with dementia;

–   people experiencing seizures;

–   survivors of domestic abuse;

–   people experiencing anti-social behaviour in their community;

–   frail and older people; and

–   children and young adults.

2.2 Telehealth

Telehealth products support remote health and well-being management through exchange of information between health professional/ authorised staff and the patient. This operates outside of a clinical setting (typically at home), to assist in diagnosis and management. These products are aimed at helping people manage their short- or long-term health conditions in a community environment e.g. those with:

– long term conditions such as

- diabetes,

- stroke,

- heart failure and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease,

– short-term conditions to provide surveillance as part of post-operative care in a supported discharge service.

Telecare and Telehealth services are carried out through the provision of a range of sensors and equipment and the use of remote monitoring, detection, location, response, prevention and/ or mitigation of risks. There will also be the expectation that review calls are undertaken as part of the individual's wellbeing.

Equipment and services may be delivered to individuals living in their own homes, or through community/ grouped living schemes such as sheltered housing or extra care.

As part of our service, we are keen to make more use of pro-active wellbeing checks. We are exploring the possibility to offer a broader range of proactive and preventative wellbeing calls. We wish to make provision for services of this kind, within this contract, depending on cost, demand and other factors.

3 Service Provision

3.1 Contents

GYBC has prepared this specification document in accordance with their requirements. Service providers should ensure that they read all of the documentation and ensure that their pricing submission is in line with the specification provided.

3.2 Standards and Accreditations

In order to apply for this opportunity service providers must hold the TSA Quality Standards Framework. In addition, service providers are required to work in line with the following standards;

- BS EN 50134-7:2017 - Alarm systems. Social alarm systems. Application guidelines

- ISO 9001:2015 – Quality Management Systems

- ISO 14001:2015 - Environmental Management System

- ISO27001:2013 - Information Security Management System

The Service Provider's ARC platform must support a range of digital telecare signalling standards for both dispersed and grouped scheme alarm equipment including:

- SCAIP (the Swedish Social care alarm internet protocol),
- TS50134-9 (CENELEC)

- BS8521 – 2 (NOWIP)

- The Service Provider's ARC platform must also accept digital alarm calls that are encrypted using the encryption standards set out in TS50134-9 (CENELEC)
- The Service Provider's ARC platform must support a range of analogue telecare signalling standards for both dispersed and grouped scheme alarm equipment including:

  - TT92
  - TTNew
  - TTOld
  - BS8521

- The Service Provider's ARC platform must also support the failover of digital alarm devices to analogue signalling in the event of a failure of digital connectivity.

3.3   TSA Quality Standards Framework - Telecare Monitoring

3.3.1   Description

Telecare monitoring is an integral part of the Technology Enabled Care (TEC) pathway. For many customers and carers, the ARC provides a 'lifeline' to help and support, often in life-threatening situations.

Every day, a typical ARC responds to hundreds of calls for help and works proactively to reassure and support its users. As well as the "low battery alerts" and queries about the timing of domiciliary care visits, customers call to report physical illness, from coughs and colds to medical emergencies. Although working remotely, call handlers develop strong professional relationships with customers, often gaining a unique insight into their lives.

3.3.2   Key Outcomes

Service providers will ensure that monitoring is personal, rather than equipment centred. Services will be tailored to meet individual customer's needs as detailed below:

- wherever possible, customers and carers will be supported to make choices related to the way in which the service is delivered;

- all calls will be dealt with in a timely manner, the response to which will meet the needs of each customer with suitable evidence being available; and

- service providers will monitor performance in the context of the whole, e.g. responding to calls in a timely way is critical, but how they then manage those calls is of equal importance.

3.3.3   The Audit Process

The audit process will seek evidence that the key outcomes have been met. As a minimum, TEC Quality certified organisations must:

- have an agreed process in place for passing calls to the emergency services;

- have documented procedures in place to quality assure call handler activity through regular call audit;

- actively support customers and carers to make informed decisions about their care;

- have a suite of comprehensive procedures in place which support the monitoring process. These should be evidence based where applicable, reflecting local and national policy and guidance;

- ensure that the wider needs of customers and carers are considered and that these are clearly documented;

- where required and with consent, demonstrate that customers are signposted to other agencies which might help meet their wider needs;

- demonstrate that telecare monitoring contributes to the achievement of agreed outcomes for customers and carers;

- have procedures in place to ensure a service customer's welfare when they cannot be contacted;

- ensure that there are processes in place to ensure customer data is up to date;

- continue to monitor the welfare of a customers where a call has been passed to a responder e.g. NOK, or the Emergency Services until that responder arrives. Services can choose how they do this as long as the outcome is achieved;

- have an agreed call handler-specific training programme in place and ensure that relevant training is updated/ repeated at specified intervals, e.g. customer care, first level fault diagnosis;

- have access to support from senior managers at all times via a dedicated on-call structure;

- demonstrate their ability to match capacity to meet fluctuations in activity, especially at periods of peak demand;

- ensure that frequent callers are identified and that there is a process in place for linking in with other agencies to ensure that the service continues to meet their needs;

- have procedures in place for authorising access to customer premises and confirming identity, e.g. remote door release, or sharing key safe codes;

- demonstrate that all voice communication with customers is recorded and that these recordings are stored, accessed and retained in a manner that reflects local and national policy and guidance; and

- ensure that there is a documented mechanism in place which provides support for staff following a difficult or distressing call.

3.4   General Requirements

3.4.1   On-going Requirements

Service providers will be expected to:

- provide a 24/7/365 monitoring service via an ARC platform with the capability as below:

- ability to receive both analogue landline and digital landline calls;

- ensure control centre equipment is fully compatible with alarm protocols employed in systems supplied by all major community alarm and telecare equipment vendors in the UK and Europe;

- provide sufficient call handling capacity to be able to meet the requirements of GYBC over the period of the contract including having a detailed business continuity plan in the event of failure;

- use only numbers that will charge at a local rate to enable a customer to use an inclusive call plan;

- have open API's and the ability to allow external software such as bespoke platforms and equipment to work within it;

- have the ability to allow GYBC to manually input individual ID's and edit records;

- edit records on behalf of customers if they request changes via the ARC directly;

- have a specific detailed continuity plan for SIM failure;

- support GYBC in routinely contacting customers should a scheme system fail;

- report urgent faults (including lost pendants) to the relevant team via telephone call 24/7/365;

- report all other faults via email to a dedicated email address using a pre-agreed proforma;

- supply dedicated lines for the programming/connection of GYBC customers to the ARC;

- have the ability to provide outbound calls as part of a future wellbeing service or to enable a third party to deliver this service.

- Cover any VPN requirements and associated costs

- Perform user acceptance tests ahead of go-live

- Allow connections to any device, social alarm or otherwise to be connected to the platform

- Ability to manage GYBC user accounts for any 3rd party platform

- Allow password reset rights to be given to GYBC for any 3rd party platform

- Provide an exception report that details calls excluded from KPI's with reasons for exclusion

- cover any costs associated with monitoring deterioration of service users awaiting an ambulance.

Equipment requirements

- be capable of providing monitoring services to all the products both analogue and digital identified below as a minimum, please note that the monitoring of other products may be required during the contract term;

  o base units for landline and mobile enabled technologies;

  o activity monitors/GPS trackers/movement detectors;

  o Seizure monitoring;

  o community and personal alarms e.g. pendants or watches;

  o pull cords;

  o environmental sensors such as: carbon monoxide detectors;

  o smoke detectors; and

  o heat detectors.

- provide a Device Management Platform to monitor dispersed alarm units;

- be able to auto-test housing schemes online;

- be able to integrate a mobile response service into the service offering;

- be able to integrate with third party repairs and maintenance suppliers and accept automated fault reporting;

- to follow strict safety protocols in relation domestic abuse alarms;

- be able to provide language services where required; and

- have procedures in place to enable customers with a cognitive impairment, sensory impairment or speech and language impairment to use the service.

- To provide GYBC notification of any outages of analogue or digital devices

- To have heartbeat functionality on digital devices and to monitor those heartbeats 24/7 and react accordingly

- Provide the above services (in addition to the 24/7/365 alarm monitoring) from Monday - Friday 17:00-08:45 and Friday 17:00 to Monday 08:45 and Bank Holidays inclusive and/or when healthcare services are not monitoring the equipment directly;

- Further cover may be needed at short notice, as agree by both parties but will not be subject to agreed performance targets;

- Charges will be noted in the Appendix; and

- To cover planned events like team meetings, quarterly staff briefings, annual staff conferences and office closures.

3.4.2   Quality Standards

Service providers are required to:

- apply the most rigorous standards of staff recruitment, vetting, induction, training and monitoring to ensure that calls are answered in an appropriate way and the appropriate response initiated;

- respond to all calls promptly and within the timescales set out by GYBC requirements and the TSA Quality Standards Framework;

- apply the highest standards of data security;

- maintain comprehensive records of call activity, responses and outcomes in an auditable format;

- provide management information to GYBC as defined within Section 7;

- have comprehensive Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery procedures in place which are evidenced as tested regularly and

- have robust policies and procedures for dealing with incidents and service failures.

3.5   GYBC Specific Requirements

During the term of the contract GYBC would like the flexibility to grow their menu of support options giving more choice to its customers.

GYBC always look to provide the best sensors possible and will continue to source equipment through various providers, as such service providers should employ control centre equipment that is fully compatible with alarm protocols employed in systems supplied by all major community alarm and telecare equipment vendors in the UK and Europe.

GYBC require the provision of a dedicated telephone number for this contract, allowing its customer's lifeline alarm units to connect to the monitoring centre, which would assist in providing a more efficient approach to any changes to the call monitoring service provider in the future.

GYBC require access to a raw data through an API as a minimum, additionally they require access to a portal to view information related to the contract, run reports and extract asset information. Furthermore, GYBC would like to work with the successful service provider to have a comprehensive asset management system that captures data including equipment serial numbers, install dates, end of life dates and information related to spares / equipment held by GYBC.

4   Complaints Procedure

All official complaints about the supplier and the service provided will be handled by Great Yarmouth's Resolution team. The team must be provided with information and all recordings to help resolve matters for our customers

The information requested may include (but is not exclusive to):

− copies of calls received by a customer/service provider;

− call recordings where required upon request within 48 hours;

− information relating to actions carried out by the service provider;

− confirmation of which GYBC's Procedures, if any, were followed; and

− any advice that was sought from GYBC staff and the name of the staff member who provided the advice.

The service provider must have the ability to record all calls received from GYBC customers, copies of calls should be retained for a period of six months.

5   Social Value

GYBC is committed to abide by the legislation introduced by the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012, in so far as that they will consider how they can improve the social, environmental and economic well-being of communities when undertaking procurement activities. GYBC will work with the Social Value Lead from the appointed service provider to agree opportunities in developing social value initiatives during the contract term. More detail will be requested in the quality questions.

6   Data Protection

This contract will be covered by General Data Protection Regulation ("GDPR"), as such the successful service provider is required to comply with the relevant data protection legislation including those listed below and any current or future GYBC Data Protection policies in the execution of the contract.

Data Protection Legislation means:

1) Data Protection Act 2018

2) the EC Personal Data Protection Directive 95/46/EC;

3) the EC Directive 2002/58/EC; and

4) all other applicable laws and regulations in any jurisdiction relating to or impacting on the processing of personal data including, on and from 25 May 2018, the GDPR, together with all legally binding guidance and codes of practice issued or adopted by a regulator (or group of regulators) with jurisdiction over the data processing arrangements contemplated in the contract, all as may be amended, supplemented or replaced from time to time.

GDPR means the European General Data Protection Regulation, namely Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of Personal Data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC."

7 Performance Management

7.1 Performance Management

The contract manager from the provider will be responsible for performance management of the contract. Management will take place through analysis of data, consideration of performance against the key performance indicators included at Section 7.3 and regular meetings with the service provider.

Contract management meetings shall take place at regular intervals between GYBC and the service provider, during the initial three months of the contract term meetings shall be held monthly.

Any issues that arise from this meeting will be investigated and a high-level response should be received by GYBC within 48 hours and a detailed response should be received in 7 days. If there is no response in 7 days, there needs to be a clear escalation path for GYBC to follow.

7.2 Management Information

The table below identifies the management information to be provided to GYBC during the contract term on a daily, weekly and/or monthly basis.

Report Type	24hr	Weekly	Monthly	Comments
CareLine terminations	✔			
CareLine starters	✔			
Low battery CareLine	✔			
No contact after 3 months report CareLine			✔	
Call history				On request
Battery failure	✔			

Report Type	24hr	Weekly	Monthly	Comments
Incident reports	✔			
Card left	✔			
Mains failure	✔			
Data checking			✔	
Management reports				On request
Inbound/outbound call activity			✔	
Frequent user report (high user)		✔		
CareLine Advisor message	✔			
Amendments to system	✔			
Staff on call history Call Monitoring		✔		
Out of hours emergency calls	✔			
TSA KPIs			✔	
Falls Reporting		✔		

Frequent user parameters as follows:

- Pendant or pull cord usage of more than 5 calls a day
- Fire/ smoke alarm activated more than 3 times a week

7.3 Key Performance Indicators

The service provider shall provide data to evidence their performance against the key performance indicators set out below. Detail to be submitted to the contract manager to the schedule as set out in the "Reporting Frequency" column.

Performance Measure	Target	Reporting Frequency
Calls answered within sixty seconds*	97.50%	Monthly
Calls answered within three minutes*	99.00%	Monthly
Calls answered within five minutes*	100.00%	Monthly
Number of customer complaints per month	Maximum 0.02% of client base	Monthly
Operator call monitoring checks per month	Minimum five calls	Monthly
Emergency - new customer set-up completed within four hours	100.00%	Monthly
Standard - new customer set-up completed within twenty-four hours	100.00%	Monthly
Number of calls handled	100%	Monthly

Performance Measure	Target	Reporting Frequency
Number of calls abandoned	0%	Monthly

* Target to exclude calls answered automatically

In order to manage the performance within the contract we have included a KPI Penalty mechanism which will be triggered by 3 months underperformance (as per the above table) in a rolling 12 month period. The successful bidder will be offered the opportunity to provide mitigating evidence during performance management meetings. Details of potential charging scale in Appendix 5.

7.4   Quality Assurance

The service provider shall put in place a robust quality management system that they will use for internal monitoring to ensure that the level of service delivered is as required by GYBC. Details of the proposed quality assurance system shall be provided within the tender submission.

CABINET

URN:	**URN 22-161**
Report Title :	**Control Centre and Community Alarm Services Emergency**
	Contract Decision
Report to:	**ELT – 22 November 23**
	Cabinet – 4 December 23
	Scrutiny - 12 December 2023
	Cabinet - 14 December 2023

Responsible Cabinet Member: Cllr Flaxman-Taylor, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Wellbeing

Responsible Director / Officer : Kate Price, Head of Health Integration and Communities &

Nicola Turner, Head of Housing Assets

Is this a Key decision ?   No

Date added to Forward Plan of Key Decisions if a Key Decision: N/a

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Council currently operates an in-house Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) which takes calls from sheltered housing resident alarms, dispersed community alarms and provides the Councils' Out of Hours call response service. After charges to residents and tenants for paid-for alarm services, the cost of the ARC is around £200,000 in subsidies from the Councils' budgets.

With the national switching of phonelines from analogue to digital, which is already underway and is due for completion by 2025, the current software and hardware used by the in-house service would require significant investment to maintain this service going forwards. In addition, there is a current service risk associated with the digitalisation of phone lines which requires prompt action to resolve, and additional issues related to this are emerging weekly along with difficulties caused by recent IT changes.

This, combined with significant risk to the service from a lack of resilience in the staffing capacity and limited ability to draw on shift cover from our existing partnership arrangement means we have a significant risk that this service could become undeliverable at short notice, which would put the lives of those relying on the alarm monitoring service at risk.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That following referral from the Cabinet, Scrutiny Committee are asked to consider and comment on the following recommendations to be considered by Cabinet at it's meeting on the 15 December 2023:

(a) Supports the direct award of a contract to the current standby service provider, CareLine365, which provides current shift cover in order to minimise risk to residents under existing officer delegations to the Executive Director – People and Section 151 Officer in association with the Monitoring Officer as an Operational Emergency under article (42.10.5) given the possible risk to life.

(b) Notes the procurement of a 24/7 out of hours telephone call answering service needed to deliver the emergency out of hours call handling (currently provided by the alarm monitoring service as an additional service) will need to be expedited as a result of the above.

1. **INTRODUCTION**

1.1   The Council currently operates a non-statutory Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) which provides a monitoring service for sheltered housing tenants, community alarms and associated assistive technology, as well as providing this equipment for rental to residents for a fee from its Wherry Way office. This service is provided from a small in-house team providing one staff member who monitors incoming calls operating in 24/7 shifts. Gaps in shift cover and staff breaks are provided by an external contractor under agreement (CareLine365 – part of the Appello Group based in Norwich).

1.2   Alarm connections currently provided are listed below:

- Sheltered housing alarms – 945 individual properties and 105 communal/fire connections;

- Community alarms – 915 connections/users (Supporting 973 individuals, 55 out of borough);

- Be-at-Home alarms – 70 temporary units for people being discharged from hospital.

1.3 In-house staffing resource is made-up of 13 posts:

- 1 x Community Alarms Officer – Grade 5 – 37hrs

- 1 x Business Support Officer – Grade 4 – 15hrs

- 7 x Control Centre Operators – Grade 3 plus enhancements – various shift patterns covering 24/7 operations

- 4 x Relief Control Centre Operators – Grade 3 – various shifts, two posts vacant

1.4 The service, while receiving an income from its alarm monitoring and rental services to residents, currently runs at a significant financial loss to the council.

The summarised expenditure cost and income based on previous and current yearly budgets is shown below:

Staffing costs (inc. on costs)	£366,431
Non-staffing costs (inc equipment)	£174,948
Total direct costs	**£541,379**
Income (alarm connections, rental, OOH charge inc. VAT)	-£335,834
Deficit	*£205,545*

1.5 Almost all Community Alarms need upgrading to digital as the national rollout (from analogue to digital telephony) continues. The cost of upgrading to digital is approximately £200 per unit, with a lifespan of approximately 5 years. The weekly charge to rent a Community Alarm unit without monitoring is £1.90 (exc. VAT). The new digital alarms additionally incur a cost of £48 per unit for an annual SIM data connection. Therefore, it takes approximately 4 years of the 5-year lifespan to pay for the initial investment before there is a small surplus if fee increases were not made to pass the costs on to customers.

1.6 To maintain the service as-is and make ready for the new digital specification would require the Council to spend c£130,000 investment to replace current analogue alarms to digital alarms and also absorb the £48 per unit per year i.e. circa. £44,000 per annum for SIM data card costs to support connectivity, as well as increased costs for a digital monitoring platform of around £12,000 per annum.

1.7 The TSA (TEC Services Association) is the industry and advisory body for Technology Enabled Care (TEC) in the UK. The TSA provide an independent, not-for-profit organisation which provide consultancy and advice services to organisations providing TEC services. Alarm Receiving Centres (ARCs) can get TSA accreditation for meeting their industry standards. GYBC does not hold TSA accreditation and, within existing structures and staffing levels, it would not be able to reach the standards required to gain accreditation.

1.8 In order for the Council to be able to reach the required TSA accreditation standards as a minimum, the cost to the Council would increase the deficit to around £461,000 including

recharges - an increase of £95,000 on current staffing costs as this requires more than one call hander to be on-shift at any time with supervision, as well as increased costs of digital equipment and software.

1.9 There is no scope to increase the fees in order to recoup an additional income of this magnitude as the service is currently one of the more expensive on the market, despite not being TSA accredited or fully digital, and the market is very competitive with commercial providers with larger operations able to offer much lower rates to residents. An increase in costs would likely result in a decline in clients, increasing the service deficit.

Example comparison costs are shown below:

Operator	Set Up Cost	Monthly cost for basic alarm and monitoring
GYBC	£54 - £65	£17.58
CareLine 365	£0	£11.99 - £15.99 (free £15 voucher)
Telecare24	£45	£9.00 - 13.99 (free key safe)
n-able (Norse)	£0	£15.99

1.10 The digital upgrade also has an impact on the sheltered housing provision. The current hardware for the alarm system was designed for operation on analogue phonelines. The move to digital telephone exchanges (happening now) and change to all phonelines being digital by December 2025 is a serious operational risk as the system is less reliable when operating over digital lines as calls can drop out and not reach the ARC. An upgrade is required to ensure security of connection as the digital change increases pace and completed in December 2025.

1.11 The above has resulted in the need to look at the options in the market for an alternative to ensure provision for residents, sheltered tenants and vulnerable community alarm customers, which meets their current and future needs in an affordable way for which officers have engaged the services of the TSA to assist us with market analysis and advice.

1.   PROPOSAL

2.1 Were the Council to retain the in-house ARC, there would be a significant increased cost which cannot be met by the available budget. Therefore, retaining the service as-is, is considered not feasible on detailed options appraisals.

2.2 For the purposes of value for money, it is proposed that the ARC is not separated by its service delivery for sheltered housing tenants and community alarm customers (it is not possible to divide the service use as the staffing levels remain the same) which may result in a more favourable financial cost to the HRA for long term as the more lucrative customer base is included in the package.

2.3 There are a number of key requirements identified by officers in the development of these proposals which are key to include as minimum requirements for the benefit of residents and the futureproofing of the service in terms of growing health needs and emerging technology:

- Any new service should be able to TUPE existing staff.
- Provider should be TSA accredited and maintain that accreditation.
- Any new monitoring service should have open protocols which allow equipment from any supplier to be monitored rather than restricted to only equipment supplied by the monitoring company.
- Provider will take on the responsibility to upgrade dispersed equipment to digital.
- Provider to have technology in place (digital bridge) to minimize the risk of call dropouts during the national analogue to digital switch-over and post switch over.
- Provider to work in partnership on key current projects enabling hospital discharge (Be at Home).

2.4   Ideally a provider would also have an option for the Council to be a referral partner with a payment made for identifying new customers however this needs testing with the new external provider.

2.5   A full tender process would be expected to result in a new service being mobilised and operational in January 2025. This would present 14 months of running with the current service risks.

2.6   Given the increase in immediate risks identified which officers believe are likely to impact on loss of life (should the Council's service fail to respond to an alarm call owing to either lack of staff cover or analogue to digital drop-out) this report proposes a direct award to the existing partner organisation which provides staff cover to the in-house staff given the timescale for a full procurement. Were this process to go to a full tender process, there is a significant risk that during this timescale the Council could be in a position where at short notice it becomes unable to deliver this service in its current form.

2.7   In order to achieve this, officers recommend that article (42.10.5) of the Councils' Constitution be invoked to deem this an Operational Emergency as there is a possible risk to life from a service failure given the circumstances listed below with regards to unforeseen service resilience in both staffing and external availability of cover. These factors, along with the digital rollout increasing risk, are not within the Councils' control.

2.8   With staff aware that this is being explored for some time and that it is likely that an external provider will result, many have expressed an interest in leaving given the level of uncertainty. With recruitment so challenging at the moment, it is likely with their skills and experience that control centre staff will be able to source suitable employment in a very short space of time.

2.9   Equally, with a shortened procurement via a direct award, existing staff will be able to transfer to the new local service provider thereby reducing the risk of staff leaving.

2.10   Currently the service has such low staffing levels that it is not possible to cover all current shifts, and the in-house service has an agreement in place with CareLine365 (also known as LifeLine who are part of the national Appello group). CareLine365 has an agreement to cover shifts as needed and as able, as well as breaks for the call handlers as they work solo, from their office in Norwich.

2.11   CareLine365 maintains staff trained in the Councils' current analogue monitoring platform, Jontek, in order to be able to provide the cover the Council needs as it is not part of their standard service delivery. They have noted that they would be unlikely to be able to cover the whole 24/7 service delivery should there be a service failure due to lack of Council staff. They

will also have a reduced ability to cover shifts should there be any illnesses or covid outbreaks over the winter period in their own staff which means we do not have a guaranteed fallback should the service be unable to cover shifts.

2.12   As this service is potentially lifesaving, it has been established that this risk and the potential outcome for tenants and community alarm service users if their alarms were unanswered, are such that under the constitution we can enact a waiver as an operational emergency and move to a direct award instead of completing a full procurement process.

2.13   Should the Council be found to have known about these risks and not acted in a timely manner and a service failure result in a preventable death then the council would likely face a significant investigation and adverse ramifications – legal, reputational, and potentially financial.

2.14   With the ARC being externalised from the Council, this also requires the current Out of Hours offer to be reviewed (which is already in progress) and an alternative provider for this 24/7 call handling sought. As the removal of the ability to take 24/7 telephone calls, some of which are statutory, may also result in a service failure (given lack of staff cover), it is additionally recommended that a new 24/7 out of hours services for the Council is sought by way of a Request to Quote as a waiver of full procurement based on the timescales and level of risk. As this risk is under £250,000 that this can be approved by the Executive Directors under guidance from the Monitoring Officer, this element is for note as required due to unforeseen circumstances.

2.15   It is proposed that Cabinet approve this recommendation to a direct award under a waiver under the identified provision in the Councils' Constitution based on the significant level of risk to clients and the financial risk to the Council for alarm monitoring and in due course.

3.   NEXT STEPS

3.1   To continue with the consultancy already in train with the TSA to undertake due diligence of the Councils' existing provider, CareLine365 to determine that this external provider can meet the minimum requirements outlined in the above section.

3.2   Utilising this external and industry leading support, officers will negotiate an initial offer from CareLine365 that demonstrates it is able to deliver good market value and best consideration for the client base including the ongoing Sheltered Housing alarm monitoring scheme contract. Officers will ensure the proposal is in the best interest of the Council with robust monitoring and ability to enforce high performance standards which safeguards residents' lives.

3.3   Using the proposal, the Council will consult with staff and the trade union on the TUPE proposal and ensure this represents a fair offer to staff and ensure there is time to work with CareLine365 on areas of improvement where required.

3.4   The Council will agree a communications plan with Sheltered and Community Alarm users to ensure they are aware of the coming changes. For sheltered tenants, there is no requirement to consult on a change as it is operationally minimal, however there is a risk that should they wish to test or enquire about the move they use their alarm to call the Council (this is a regular occurrence for repairs and general enquiries) and if this happens it may prevent

legitimate alarm calls from coming into the ARC due to busy lines so it is in the councils' best interests to communicate the changes clearly to tenants as early as possible.

3.5   Community alarm customers will need to opt-in to the move to an external provider as it is not covered under their existing contract. Therefore, all customers will need to be written to regarding the changes and actively opt-in to being transferred.

3.6   Officers will work with CareLine365 to prepare the Jontek data for a transfer to their digital Evo platform.

3.7   Out of Hours service provision will need to be in place by the move over so contracts for this will be given priority as well to ensure no risk to the service with the necessary legal advice sought.

3.8   Expected timescales to minimise the risks set out in this report are:

- December 2023 – January 2024: Engage with TSA for consultancy support; work with CareLine365 to establish a formal proposal; get the data ready to migrate; communicate with customers to inform of changes including GDPR opt-in.
- February 2024: Consult with staff on TUPE proposals.
- March 2024: Agree and sign contracts; mobilize data transfers.
- April 2024 – new service begins with no gap in service provision for residents.

4.   FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1   The implication of not undertaking an out-sourcing model, even outside the current risks, is that the HRA and GF will carry the increased, and as yet not fully known total capital costs of the digital switch-over. This is a minimum of £235,000 in the short term on interim technology and dispersed alarm upgrades.

4.2   Potential annual savings of £200,000 per year to the council cannot be realised against the existing costs of running an internal alarm receiving centre as per 1.4 costs summary.

4.3   To meet TSA accreditation and the change to digital software and hardware (not including the initial capital costs) would increase budgets for the service by approximately £300,000 on top of the current £200,000 deficit, increasing the budget of the service which would need to be met by the General Fund.

4.4   There will be costs to a procurement exercise with TSA consultancy of c.£20,000.

4.5   To not act and be found negligent if an alarm call is not responded to would pose an unknown but significant potential financial risk to the Council.

5.   RISK IMPLICATIONS

5.1   The risk of allowing the service to continue as it stands for a longer period of time is potentially risking the lives of residents should the service fail for lack of staff to answer calls or ensure the operation running of the service at short notice.

5.2   Missing alarm calls could lead to the council being held responsible for negligence in the case of a tenant or resident's death should the alarm not connect due to the digital upgrade of telephone exchanges and phone lines which is a known risk.

5.3 Delaying decisions in this report longer term, outside the immediate risk, will mean the council still has to upgrade the sheltered housing alarm equipment in the interim to adapt the system to full digital functionality (circa £104,000). This may or may not be compatible with the successful contractor and therefore presents a financial waste.

5.4 As this digital switch-over is happening UK-wide, there is a risk that the limited market of quality providers may be engaged with bidding for other contracts and may not be as receptive to a smaller quantity of connections when there are more lucrative contracts on offer.

5.5 Ongoing issues with our own IT services are already posing issues with our VPN regularly causing periods of non-coverage when external call monitoring is used which would not be required with a direct service, reducing risk significantly.

5.6 To not act based on the known risk to life risks in the immediate term would put the Council at risk of being found negligent should there be no service available when an alarm is activated.

6.   LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 This process to procure with a waiver will require legal and HR advice and procurement support in relation to staffing and availability of choice in a limited digital alarm market.

6.2 There would be a legal implication if we were unable to provide at short notice a service for which we are contracted by the almost 2,000 customers to provide to them as a paid service.

6.3 The legal basis within the constitution for requesting this approval to act as an operational emergency is:

42.10.5 Operational emergency

(a) Subject to any legal limitations, the Head of Paid Service, the s151 Officer or an Executive Director, having consulted the Monitoring Officer (or their nominated deputy), may approve an exemption to any part of these Contract Standing Orders that is necessary because of an Operational Emergency creating immediate risk to life, persons or property within the Borough or causing serious disruption to Council services (including any emergency or disruption under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004). An Operational Emergency is a situation that is the result of an unforeseen event over which the Council has no control. This procedure must not be used when a requirement has become late due to lack of planning on the part of the Council.

(b) Full documentation must be completed regardless of the urgency of the requirement and a full and transparent audit trail must be made throughout the procurement process. Where the value of the Contract is over £250,000 a report supporting the use of this power must be taken to Cabinet at the first available opportunity.

6.4 While full costs of the contract are not yet known until the TSA supported negotiations begins, it is prudent to consider the life of the contract could be, but may not be, over £250,000 and therefore Cabinet is requested to approve this action.

6.5 The Call Monitoring associated contract will be under this threshold therefore appropriate senior officers will be able to fulfil this approval, but it is asked that Cabinet note the required additional action.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 It is vital for the Council that it takes these decisions imminently based on the risk to alarm users, the potential financial impact and associated legal risks. With these risks in place it is our obligation to ensure we do all we can to mitigate these to avoid risking lives.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Previous ELT Reports dated March 2023 and updated appraisal of market options for services in-scope.

Consultations	Comment
Monitoring Officer Consultation:	As part of ELT
Section 151 Officer Consultation:	As part of ELT
Existing Council Policies:	N/A
Equality Issues/EQIA assessment:	Yes – on file